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DEPT FOR SE WILLIAMSON AND AF/SPG  
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DEPT PLS PASS USAID FOR AFR/SUDAN

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SUBJECT: NCP ACCUSES SOUTH OF VIOLENCE AGAINST NORTHERNERS

Ref: Khartoum 536

¶1. (U) On April 8, several newspapers in Northern Sudan published stories highlighting supposed escalating violence against Muslim Northerners living in the South. GNU Vice President Taha's public remarks about the same issue several days earlier were also widely featured in both the local Northern press and on pan-Arab satellite station Al-Jazeera.

¶2. (SBU) Michael Makuei, the GoSS Minister for Legal Affairs and Constitutional Development, told Congen Poloff that President Bashir also raised this specific subject with Vice President Kiir during their Khartoum-based meetings the week of April 1 (also reported in reftel). In particular, Bashir cited the death of a Northern merchant during a recent robbery in Juba. According to the Minister, Bashir told Kiir "if you can't protect Northerners in the South, I will pull them all out myself." Kiir reportedly responded that if that was how the President felt, they should announce separation now. Makuei said Bashir then back-pedaled from his statement, while Kiir committed to do more in Juba to protect Northerners. Upon Kiir's return to Juba, he convened an extraordinary session of the Southern Sudan Security Council in which he reportedly briefed relevant officials on Bashir's remarks and demanded immediate action.

¶3. (SBU) The Congen DLO subsequently spoke to several third-country-national security officials in Juba regarding increased violence against Northern Sudanese in the South. Other than this killing of the one Northern merchant in an armed robbery, none of them was aware of any specific acts of violence against Northerners in the last few months.

¶4. (SBU) During a meeting, however, one local security official did mention that many of the Northern Sudanese in Juba are merchants and that some Southerners resent what they suspect is 'some sort of plan' involving these Northern merchants. According to this official, it is widely believed that most of the merchants are employed by the Northern government as spies and that their merchandise is supplied to sell as a cover. The Northern merchants reportedly are all provided with goods from the North via ABABEEL airlines and the 'proof' is that all their shops carry identical goods. (Note: There has been violence, including murder, against these northern merchants in the past, most notably after the death of former GOSS President and SPLM leader John Garang in July 2005 when southerners heard about the violence in Khartoum following his death. End note.)

¶5. (SBU) One UN official told Congen that he did not have specific numbers, but believed there has indeed been an increase in violence in the last month or two against Northerners in Bentiu, Bor and Yei, although there had been no killings. Again, he could provide no definite numbers or incidents, but stated that in his opinion the public mood lately is more negative toward Northerners.

16. (SBU) Comment: Juba recently has seen a sharp increase in armed robberies, primarily directed against foreigners who are known to carry large sums of money due to the lack of banking facilities in the South and the resulting need to pay for everything in cash. These robberies have resulted in only one murder, however, that of the Northern merchant. It is conceivable that he was murdered because of where he was from, while foreigners are left largely unharmed in these incidents. The GoSS has treated the situation seriously, and in the last week we have seen a dramatic decline in armed robberies. We know of no other incidents in which a Northerner was attacked in Juba, but cannot rule out there may be others. However there does not appear to be evidence of a pattern of violence specifically aimed at Northerners at this time that we have been able to detect, although there is deep resentment in the South against the North, and, should there be a sudden and dramatic deterioration of relations with the North or the threat of renewed warfare, violence could become a distinct possibility. Northern accusations in this regard at this time, however, strike us more as an NCP ploy to cast the South in a harsher light than the facts would demand.

FERNANDEZ